

# **VIRGINIA LAW ENFORCEMENT ACCREDITATION**

## **PROCESS & PROCEDURES**



**August 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) has been established to provide law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth with an avenue for demonstrating that they meet commonly accepted standards for efficient and effective agency operation.

The standards used in this program were developed by the Virginia law enforcement community and certified by the Executive Board of the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission. The standards are available via the Department of Criminal Justice Services web page **[www.dcjs.virginia.gov](http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov)**. All law enforcement agencies as defined by the *Code of Virginia* are eligible to participate in the program. The Executive Board will resolve any questions regarding program eligibility.

The direct costs for agencies seeking initial or re-accredited status will include those costs incurred in the housing and meals for the on-site assessment team, and a \$250.00 accreditation fee upon certification by the Executive Board. Applicant agencies not affiliated with the founding organizations may be required to pay a \$50.00 application fee. Monies collected from the administration of the VLEPSC will be paid to VLEPSC through the board Treasurer and will be used at the discretion of the Executive Board.

## **THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

Recently appointed accreditation managers are encouraged to read the *Accreditation Managers Manual* which is available on the DCJS website. This document will greatly assist applicant agencies toward a successful accreditation.

### **A. Application**

Application for participation in the VLEPSC accreditation process is formalized with the submission of a completed *Memorandum of Understanding*. This form is available through the Program Staff at the Department of Criminal Justice Services or by visiting the DCJS web page.

### **B. Self-Assessment**

Applicant agencies initiate a self-assessment to determine compliance with applicable standards. The agency compares existing policy to applicable Commission standards and determines the level of compliance. The self-assessment phase is the most time consuming part of the accreditation process, however, most agencies can complete this phase within eighteen months. Assistance in developing policy and proving compliance is available through both Program Staff and the Virginia Law Enforcement Accreditation Coalition (VALEAC). VALEAC is an association consisting of accreditation managers and interested individuals whose purpose is to assist in the accreditation of Virginia agencies. Further information regarding VALEAC is available through Program Staff.

Applicant agencies may apply for waivers for individual standards. The agency must submit requests for waivers on the program *Waiver* form. The Program Staff will review the waiver request and advise the agency of its initial applicability. Waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis and generally will be granted in those instances where the required function is not within the agency's scope of responsibilities (such as the courtroom security standards when applied to most police departments.) The on-site assessment team has the authority to override waivers initially approved by Program Staff and to grant waivers when appropriate. Appeals to waiver decisions can be made to the Chair of the VLEPSC Executive Board whose decision is final.

### **C. On-Site Assessment**

Although not a required component of the accreditation process, applicant agencies are encouraged to conduct at least one mock assessment prior to arranging for an official on-site assessment team. Program Staff will assist the agency in arranging for the mock assessment, however, mocks will be the responsibility of the applicant agency. Agencies conducting mock assessments shall notify the Program Staff of the date of their mock and the names of the assessors who participated.

Upon notification by the agency, Program Staff will arrange with the department for the assessment dates. Staff will also provide the applicant agency a roster consisting of ten (10) potential assessors. This roster is called the Assessor Selection List (ASL). The agency CEO is given the option, but not obligation, of striking three (3) names from the ASL. The list must be returned to Program Staff as quickly as possible. Upon receipt, staff will select a team leader and other members to administer the on-site assessment. Every effort will be made by staff to provide assessors from like-size agencies. All assessors will be Virginia law enforcement personnel and be qualified by the Commission to conduct assessments.

Program Staff will notify the applicant agency of the members of the assessment team. Prior to arrival at the agency, the agency accreditation manager and the assessment team leader will have arranged for all specifics regarding team accommodations and meals for the assessment period. Travel reimbursement will be the responsibility of the applicant agency.

On the arranged dates, the team will travel to the applicant agency and conduct the on-site assessment.

When the agency is found in compliance with all applicable standards, the team leader will submit the report of findings, conclusions and recommendations to the agency and the Program Staff.

The on-site assessment is not complete until the agency has come into compliance with all applicable standards or at the expiration of the extension period.

If in the course of on-site assessment the agency is found out of compliance with any applicable standard, the team leader will immediately notify the agency. Assessment teams will assist the agency by recommending courses of action in order to come into compliance.

In those cases where compliance cannot be obtained within the scheduled assessment period, the team leader may grant a sixty-day extension to the agency. The agency is required to submit proof of compliance on the standard(s)

in question to the team leader and Program Staff prior to appearing before the Executive Board for final review.

#### **D. Formal Review**

Team reports must be submitted to the Program Staff within fourteen (14) calendar days from the completion of the on-site assessment. The applicant agency should receive a copy of this report within twenty (20) days of the completion of the on-site assessment. The agency is encouraged to appear before the Executive Board for formal review at their next regularly scheduled meeting. The Executive Board meets four times per year at sites throughout the Commonwealth. The Executive Board makes the final determination of accredited status.

Any agency that is not approved for initial accreditation by the Commission must wait six (6) months before another assessment is conducted. Those agencies must also provide to the Program Staff evidence that they have addressed all areas that contributed to their denial of accredited status on the original assessment.

#### **E. Appeal**

The CEO of an agency may appeal the decision on their accredited status by submitting a letter of appeal to Program Staff within ten (10) calendar days of the decision. The letter should state the nature and scope of the review and may include appropriate additional information justifying reconsideration of the decision.

1. In cases where an agency's accredited status has been revoked and the agency has filed the required paperwork for an appeal, the appealing agency's status shall remain as an accredited agency until the Executive Board hears the appeal. The agency shall not be required to remove any identifying decals, logos or references during this period.

The appealing agency may appear before the Executive Board at their next regularly scheduled meeting to present its position. If the agency chooses not to appear, the Executive Board will review all documentation provided by the appealing agency, Program Staff, assessment team, etc. Agency representatives shall be allowed to address the Executive Board if arrangements are made in advance regarding the number of spokespersons and approximate time requirements. Once the Executive Board has met and made its decision, the agency is notified as soon as possible in writing.

- a. If the Executive Board's decision does not favor the appealing agency, the agency shall no longer be considered an accredited

agency and shall immediately refrain from utilizing or displaying the VLEPSC logo in any manner. This includes any written reference to the agency being VLEPSC or state accredited. The agency shall not be eligible to reapply to the program for a period of twelve months (12) from the date of the appeal decision.

- b. If the appealing agency elects to withdraw their appeal prior to being heard by the Executive Board, the CEO of the appealing agency shall notify the Executive Board in writing. The agency shall not be eligible to reapply to the program for a period of twelve (12) months from the date the appeal withdrawal letter is received by Program Staff. At this point, the agency shall no longer be considered an accredited agency and shall immediately refrain from utilizing or displaying the VLEPSC logo in any manner. This includes any written reference to the agency being VLEPSC or state accredited.

**All appeal decisions by the Executive Board shall be considered final.**

## **F. Re-Accreditation**

An accredited agency will remain accredited for a term of four (4) years. The agency will be required to annually submit to the Program Staff a verification of continued compliance with Commission standards. Program Staff will distribute the verification package to each accredited agency the month before their anniversary month each year. If appropriate, the Commission may conduct on-site visits to ensure compliance. Such visits will be conducted only after ample notification to the agency and at the expense of the Commission.

Within six (6) months of the end of any accreditation term, Program Staff will contact the agency and arrange for a re-accreditation on-site assessment. The re-accreditation assessment must be conducted within the four-year accreditation term in order for the department to maintain continuous accredited status. Agencies may opt to hold the re-accreditation assessment up to three (3) months prior to the expiration of the accredited term. The re-accreditation process does not employ an Assessor Selection List. Program Staff will advise the agency of the team makeup. Should a problem arise with a potential assessor, the agency and staff may arrange for an alternate assessor.

## **G. Revocation of Accredited Status**

The Executive Board reserves the right to revoke accredited status of any agency for good cause. In those cases where accredited status is **revoked**, the Executive Board Chairperson will formally notify the agency. This action will only be taken in extreme cases and as a last resort.

Law Enforcement Agencies that are not accredited or re-accredited by the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission (VLEPSC) are not permitted to utilize or display the VLEPSC logo in any manner. This includes any written reference to the agency being VLEPSC or state accredited.

## **H. Re-application of Revoked Agencies**

Agencies whose accredited status has been revoked by the Executive Board must wait twelve (12) months before re-applying for accredited status. Agencies wishing to reenter the program must submit a letter from the agency CEO stating that all logos, decals, letterheads, references, etc. to being a state accredited agency have been removed. Once program staff receives this letter, the twelve (12) month cycle begins. At the end of the twelve (12) month period, the agency must submit a written letter requesting reentry into the program. Attached to the letter will be a report detailing the following:

1. The agency's progress in addressing the deficiencies that led the accredited status being withdrawn or revoked.
2. A detailed plan of action addressing those identified deficiencies and specific steps that will be taken to ensure compliance with all applicable standards.

This package will be submitted to the Program Staff at DCJS.

The Commission will review the application and supporting documents before application is accepted. If approved by the Commission, Program Staff will set a date for an on-site assessment. The applicant agency shall be required to produce, at a minimum, two years of compliance for each applicable standard.